



NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

The Fear of god

Tim Hillman and Matt Berry, Guest
Speakers

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Tim's Homily

In doing the research for this service I decided early on that I not only wanted to have Matt here to share the Christian perspective with us, but I wanted to really go big and ask the question, "Is there a God to Fear?"

Science and research has not proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is no God, but, then again, they haven't proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is one either. I find myself very jealous of Matt, as he is sure that his God exists and that is one question he doesn't have to wrestle with. At the same time, I'm very jealous of my Atheist friends, because they are just as sure that Matt's God or anybody else's God, for that matter, does not exist and, again, that's one question that they don't have to deal with.

I found a great transcript of a radio article originally aired on April 25, 2014. It was an Episode of Science Friday with Ira Flato on PRI and the title of the show was, "Does God Exist? Can science really disprove that?" The guest that day was science writer Amir Aczel and he is quoted as saying, "Science can't disprove the existence of God, nor should it try. Likewise, theology can't prove the existence of God."

And this is the problem that I have, personally, with whether or not God exists. I believe that if you can't prove that something doesn't exist, that leaves the distinct possibility that it does.

I found an article on the UUA web site that quoted Stephen Cartin from "The Culture of Disbelief." He talks extensively about Unitarian Universalism being viewed by one parishioner as the "easy" religion, a casual convenience and an entertaining place to be on a Sunday when one is not skiing. Cartin speaks of another parishioner who said, "Hey, this religion is great! It's a cake walk, a Sunday walk in the park—no dogma, no catechisms, no confession booths, no eternal damnation or sin—I like this! If I join this church, I just lean back and believe whatever I want to." No matter how it was explained to him what a demanding, disquieting, life-long journey it is to be *seriously* on the Unitarian Universalist path, this guy just couldn't get it! Like so many in our movement, he fixated on our *freedom* ("Thank God, at last a church where I don't have to pretend to believe all that stuff I don't believe"); he missed altogether the *haunting challenge* and *demanding tension* written into the fourth UU principle: ours is "a free *and responsible* search for truth and meaning." To be a UU is to spend a *lifetime* seeking

reality and truth, and to live in this world in an ethical and principled way. There is nothing casual or easy about that.

Charles Magistro, in the same article, is quoted as saying, "Being a UU does not give you freedom 'to believe anything you want;' it gives you rather the freedom to search for and find those beliefs from which your heart and soul cannot escape!"

To find those beliefs from which your heart and soul cannot escape.

Matt has those beliefs. I know that about him, and his God is solid and his belief in that God is solid and his believing in that God does not scare me or bother me. It doesn't bother me because I truly want to live up to the first principle, to recognize, "The inherent worth and dignity of every person." Matt is a person . . . You are a person, right? O. K., good. Because, you could be a corporation and that would be a whole different discussion.

And if Matt believes in God, I'm not afraid of his God. I want to know more about it. I want to learn. I don't want it easy. I don't want a walk in the park. I do want to go skiing, don't get me wrong. But when I ski, I'm at my mountain church with the God that gives me the sharp peaks and the crystal blue sky. In the same vain, some mornings my wife, Nadia, and I hike in the San Gabriel's and I visit that mountain church and notice the chaparral and the pines and the powder blue sky. Same sky, different color. Different God? No God at all? Does God exist? What's her name?

In their opening number the band asked the question, "What if God was one of us? Just a slob, like one of us? Just a stranger on the bus trying make his way home." There's a situation for you. You're riding on the bus and there's this normal guy, slightly balding, a little overweight, reading off of a Kindle instead of an iPad, maybe he spilled some of his soup from lunch on his shirt, just minding his own business trying to get home, but that's just his cover. He's actually the Supreme Being that created everything. You know, everything.

In 1916, in his general theory of relativity, Albert Einstein predicted that there were gravitational waves. Ripples in space-time caused by catastrophic events. On September 14, 2015, when LIGO, A Gravitational-Wave Interferometer (basically an antennae on steroids for us regular folks) set up by a group of scientists from Cal Tech, for the first time physically sensed distortions in space-time itself caused by passing gravitational waves generated by two colliding black holes nearly 1.3 billion light years away! The Big Bang! It was a real event and now we have proof! So, no God, right? Ah, not so fast there, Sparky.

Remember Amir Aczel, the man I quoted from the PRI Science Friday show? He argues, "In fact, the more science teaches us about the world, the more we see that there is structure in the universe that is very unlikely to occur on its own." "It seems so intricate, so complex, so well structured," he says. Just because we learn about it doesn't mean that there is no God.

Supporting that argument, Aczel points out that if any one of a multitude of parameters was even slightly different, the universe could not exist today as we know it. He cites physicist Roger Penrose, who calculated that the emergence of our universe had a probability so close to zero as to be unimaginable. All of these parameters had to be within an unbelievably small range of tolerance for the universe to have taken shape as it has. Physicist Leonard Susskind of Stanford says, "We are just on the knife-edge of existence."

So were we just lucky that all these things lined up the way they did? One on-line calculator gives the odds of winning the Powerball Lottery as 1 in 292,201,338.00. Yet, somehow, someone manages to win it every once in a while. Is that what the Big Bang was? The ultimate Powerball jackpot? Or was there a fix in the game? Was there an outside force that eliminated those minuscule margins of error and made it all line up just so.

So, is there a God? Atheists say no. Matt says yes. I say, nothing's been proven one way or another, and both sides sure have great arguments. But, if there is a God and it created us, do we need to fear it? Is it the God that people believe in that we fear or the people that believe in God that we fear? That may be the better question to ask. I can tell you that Matt believes in God, and I do not fear him or his God. I believe I love them both and I accept them for who and/or what they are. Maybe, he or she is just a slob like one of us, just trying to make their way home.

Note: Matt Berry spoke from notes and there is no text of his homily. It is available on audio at www.neighborhooduu.org/worship/sermons/.